

I-15 HOV lanes in Utah County open up to all drivers for construction

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LEHI — The high-occupancy vehicle lanes have been repainted and identified as general traffic lanes on I-15 in Utah County, as construction crews begin a two-and-a-half-year, \$1.7 billion reconstruction project along 24 miles of the highway.

"They'll (the lanes) be open to all traffic for the duration of the project, so through December 2012," said Heather Barnum, spokeswoman for the reconstruction project called I-15 Core.

The lanes were opened to general traffic late last week to accommodate closure of other lanes. For instance, one of the first lane closures will begin May 6, one southbound lane along the infamous "s" curve between University Parkway and Provo Center Street.

The lane will be permanently closed for 150 days — including the next four holidays: Memorial Day, July 4, Pioneer Day and Labor Day — and drivers can expect a one- to two-hour delay during rush hours. During holidays, that delay could increase to five or six hours, Barnum said.

UDOT is encouraging people to "Travel Wise," as the UDOT slogan goes, with carpooling, public transportation and telecommuting.

"Even though the Express Lane is not going to be there during construction, we absolutely are encouraging people to Travel Wise. That will lessen the number of vehicles on the road, and those strategies are going to keep us all moving."

While some crews will work on reconstructing I-15, which includes adding an additional lane in each direction, other crews will install an electronic tolling feature for the HOV lanes.

When the HOV lanes reopen in 2012, drivers who are not on motorcycles or in carpools may pay to use the HOV lanes each day, choosing whether and in which parts of the HOV lane they want to ride. Transponders in cars will communicate with antennas along the freeway and charge the drivers. Currently, drivers pay \$50 a month for a sticker allowing unlimited use of HOV lanes and may choose to continue to pay that fee. The daily fees will correspond to the traffic density in specific "zones" or sections of HOV lane. Higher density zones will cost more than lower density zones.

"Once it's open in 2012, the Express Lane will stretch continuously from U.S. 6 in Spanish Fork to 2300 North in Salt Lake," Barnum said.

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